

Achieving Results

Permanency

Goal: Provide stable, nurturing, and permanent placements as quickly as possible for children who are placed into out-of-home care



A mandated reporter recognized the signs and symptoms of a little girl who had likely been sexually abused and called CPS to report his concerns. Once CPS became involved, social workers learned of little Cheyenne's lifelong ordeal.

As a toddler, Cheyenne had been "given away" by her mother to some acquaintances whom she hoped would raise the little girl as their own daughter. These "fictive kin" were the little girl's only known parents.

A thorough CPS investigation revealed that Cheyenne's biological mother had lost her parental rights to several other children in prior years and that she had in fact "given away" another of Cheyenne's siblings, so she was clearly not a resource for the child.

As the result of increased emphasis placed upon locating birth fathers through a community-based Fatherhood Initiative, a concerted search for Cheyenne's biological father commenced. After he was located in Idaho, Cheyenne's father, Alan, stated that he knew he had a daughter and made efforts to maintain contact but he had not seen her since Cheyenne's mother fled with her when she was an infant. Alan expressed interest in obtaining custody of his little girl.

After a thorough assessment, the social worker concluded that Cheyenne would benefit from placement with her father. Although Alan has limited income and lives in a small community with limited resources he has made every effort to provide a viable home for his daughter. He has made the journey by bus to Washington state on more than one occasion to attend meetings and visit with Cheyenne.

At only eight years old, Cheyenne has already endured more than many adults do in a lifetime, and those around her are committed to doing everything they can to see that she finally has a home that is safe and stable. Cheyenne's foster parents have been phenomenal, going so far as to transport Cheyenne to Idaho for visits with her father. Even Cheyenne's Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) has driven to a distant Washington state county to help the biological mother transfer legal custody to Cheyenne's dad.

The Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC) helped with a home study of Alan's Idaho home and social workers in both Washington and Idaho are working very hard to ensure that Alan has the best possible chance of providing for and protecting his little girl.

Through DCFS, incredibly devoted foster parents, CASA, ICPC, and a dad she never knew cared about her, Cheyenne has a chance at a safe and stable home for the first time in her young life.

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Children who have experienced abuse and neglect at the hands of those whom they most trust often take a lifetime to recover. It is an unfortunate fact that children are often further impacted by multiple placements and the sense of uncertainty and alienation that is the inevitable accompaniment to time spent in the homes of strangers. Washington state is dedicated to improving every child's sense of belonging, stability and security through a variety of permanent placement options.

In the past decade children coming into state care have increasingly complex issues that make permanency planning all the more challenging. Maternal alcohol abuse during pregnancy and resultant organic childhood disorders, prenatal exposure to drugs, mental illness, fragmented family systems and escalating economic hardships all negatively impact children.

As the needs of children have grown increasingly complex, the Children's Administration has worked diligently to provide permanent homes that best address the needs of individual children.

Permanency objectives include:

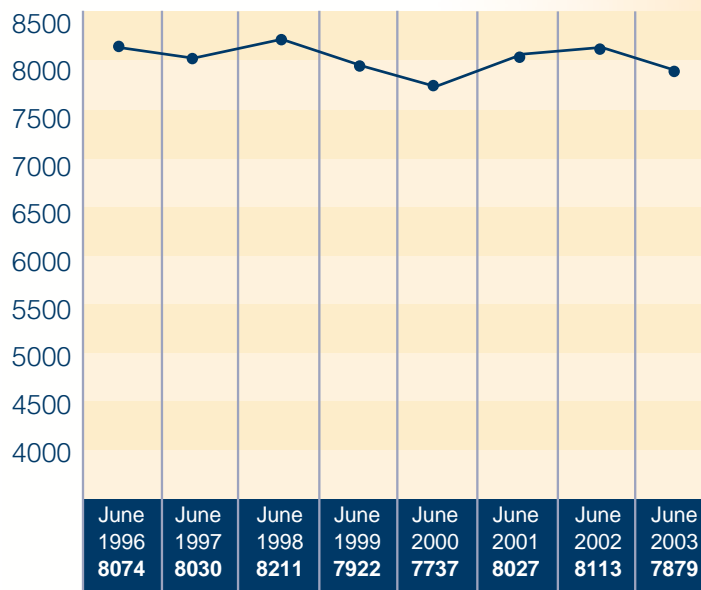
- Increase permanency for children in out-of-home care
- Decrease length of stay without increasing re-entry
- Increase stability for children in out-of-home care
- Decrease over-representation of minority children in care
- Increase relative placements
- Preserve connections with parents, siblings, and other significant people

Eight different measures are currently used to monitor these objectives and gauge success in achieving permanency for children:

- Children returned to their parents, adopted, or placed in guardianships
- Length of time to achieve permanency goal of reunification
- Length of stay for children in care
- Children re-entering care
- Children with no more than two placements
- African American children in care longer than two years
- Children placed with extended family members
- Children visiting with their parents

The administration continually strives to factor safety into every permanency plan. While reunification is the option most sought after, it is often in a child's best interest to postpone reunification in an effort to ensure safety assessment and planning is in place.

Number of Children in Out-of-Home Care*



* Count of children in out-of-home care without a permanent plan completed, who remain in care for more than 60 days, excluding children in legal custody of tribes or private agencies.

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Brought to the attention of CPS as a result of his mother's incarceration, a young boy spent his early years in uncertainty. His mother, a chronic addict, would seek treatment, and maintain short-term sobriety only to resume using drugs, engaging in criminal activities and endangering her child again. CPS worked diligently to keep the family intact; however, when it became evident that the instability would have long-term negative effects, the boy was placed into foster care and an adoptive home was sought. At the final post-adoption visit in his new home, a bright eyed seven-year-old excitedly told the social worker what his new name would be. The boy then proceeded to show off his recently won swimming award and his very own blue room decorated from wall-to-ceiling with posters of all of his baseball heroes.

Objective: Increase permanency for children in out-of-home care

Measured by: Children adopted

Those involved with children who come into state custody hope that with the provision of resources and support, children will be able to safely return to their birth families. There are incidences in which reunification is contrary to a child's best interest.

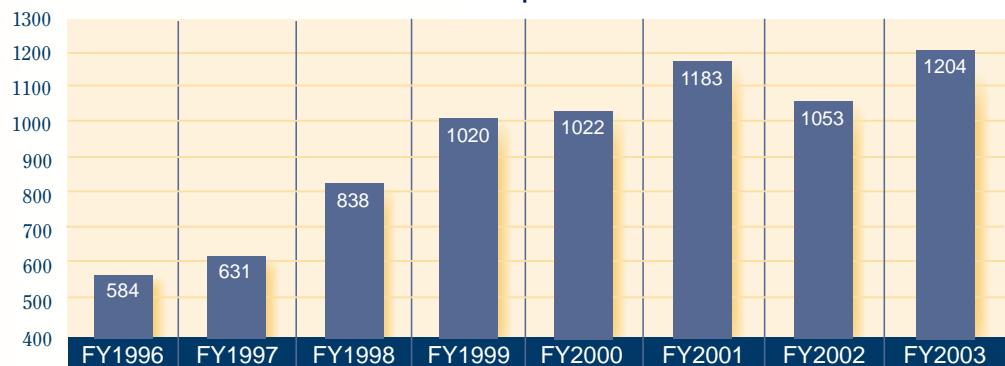
In such cases, every effort is made to identify and secure an permanent home as quickly as possible and more often than not, adoption is the most beneficial placement for children who cannot return home.

The Children's Administration has placed increased emphasis upon finding caring and capable adults who are willing to make a lifelong commitment to children in the state's foster care system through adoption.

In the past eight years, 7,535 children have been given new families and new lives through the state's adoption program.

The decline in fiscal year 2002 was the result of some families postponing adoptions until after the federal tax incentive for adoptions went into effect on January 01, 2003.

Adoptions*



* The number of children placed in out-of-home care with an accomplished permanent plan of adoption.

Permanency

Objective: Increase permanency for children placed in out-of-home care

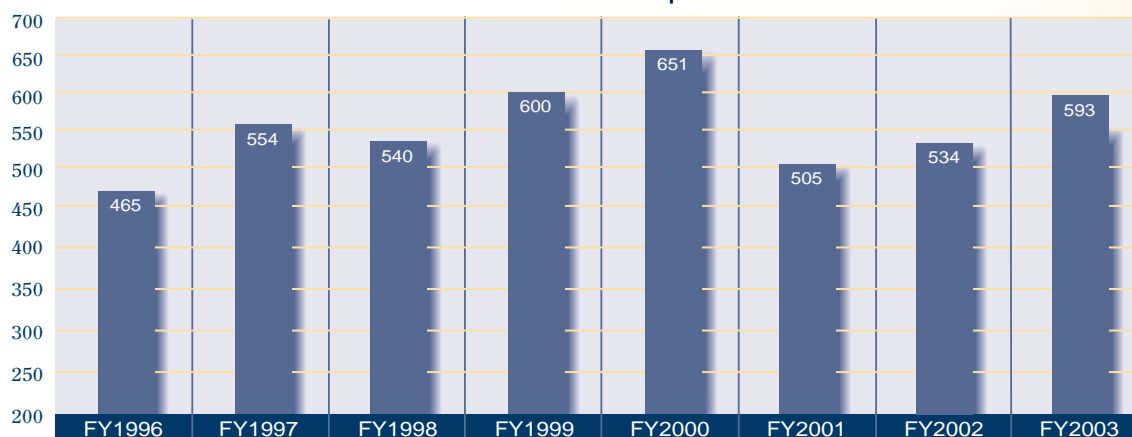
Measured by: Children placed in guardianships

For some children and youth, a guardianship may be the permanency option that best addresses their individual needs. Older youth, children who maintain ongoing contact with their parents, and children and youth for whom adoption is not advisable due to religious and or cultural issues may best be served in a guardianship placement.

A guardianship placement is one in which the caregivers have made a long-term commitment to the child in their care and who are afforded legal rights and responsibilities similar to those of a parent.

In Fiscal Year 2003, 593 new guardianships were established for children and youth in Washington state care.

Guardianships*



* The number of children placed in out-of-home care with an accomplished permanent plan of placement in a guardianship arrangement granted through either the Superior Court or Juvenile Court system.



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A two-year-old child was placed into emergency custody when substance abuse rendered her mother incapable of providing for her basic needs. Despite initial hesitancy, the mother complied with every facet of the reunification plan, completing substance abuse treatment and other requirements. The child was reunified with her mother after a safety plan and a service contract were implemented. Unannounced visits following reunification revealed a mother who showed no indicators of substance use, a well-kept home and a healthy, happy toddler.

Objective: Increase permanency for children placed in out-of-home care

Measured by: Children returned to their parents (reunification)

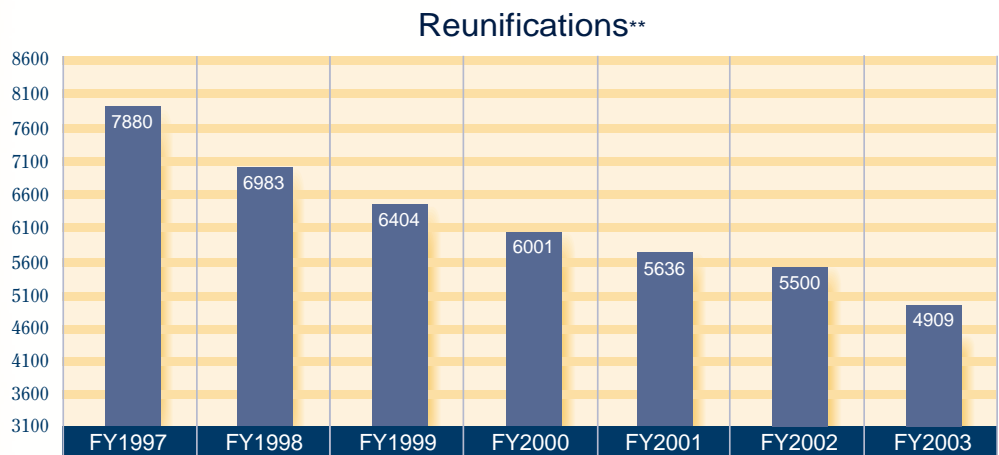
State law requires children to be reunified with their parents or legal guardians as expediently as possible whenever it is safe and in the best interest of a child. The Children's Administration makes every effort to comply with the letter and spirit of reunification mandates.

Over the course of the past seven years, the number of children who have been reunified with their parents has decreased markedly. The administration has explored causative factors related to this decline.

Most notably are the increasingly complex challenges faced by children coming into state care and the families of which they are a part. Parental substance abuse, mental health issues and myriad stressors often make reunification at best inadvisable and at worst, impossible.

Reductions in reunification can be partly attributed to increased emphasis upon the safety of children in accordance with the Kids Come First Action Agenda which states in part, "Preservation of the family, and a permanent home are very important to the well-being of the child and should be held as goals for the child protection effort. However, when interests compete, the endangered child is the primary person CPS is charged to protect."

Concurrent to the decrease in the number of children reunified with their families, the administration has tracked decreases in the number of children entering out-of-home placement and those re-entering out-of-home care following reunification. These trends seem to indicate improved support to families initially and improved decision-making about the circumstances under which a child should be returned home.



** Children placed in out-of-home care who were reunified with their parents during the fiscal year.

Permanency

Objective: Decrease length of stay without increasing re-entry

Measured by: Length of time to achieve permanency goal of reunification

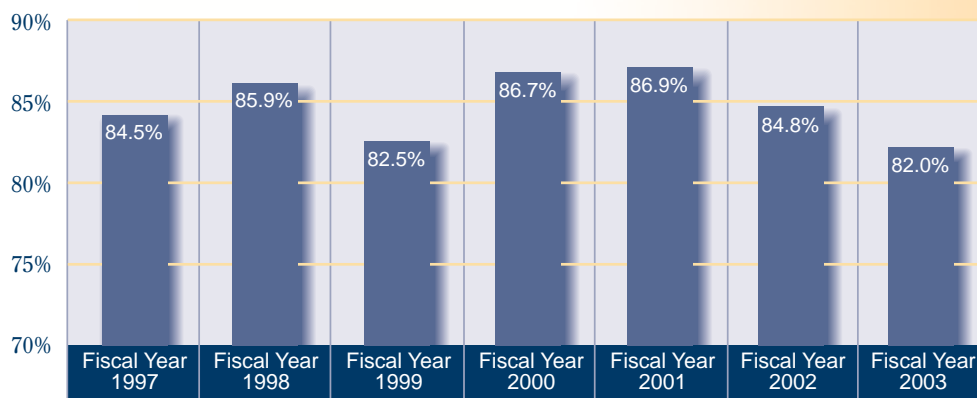
As it becomes evident that reunification is in the best interest of a child or sibling group, the administration makes every effort to facilitate the reunification process quickly.

However, family unity must never come at the cost of a child's safety; therefore, CA employs a variety of safety strategies and community supports in securing the safety of children and stability of families involved.

Safety assessments, safety plans, reunification assessments, service agreements and various family support services have all contributed to a timely reunification rate of between 82.5 and 86.9 percent over the seven year period reported.

The decline in the past two years may be attributed to the implementation of a more formalized safety assessment and planning process.

Percent of Reunifications in Less than 12 Months*



* Percent of children reunified with their parents within 12 months of placement in out-of-home care.



Permanency

Objective: Decrease length of stay without increasing re-entry

Measured by: Length of stay for children in care

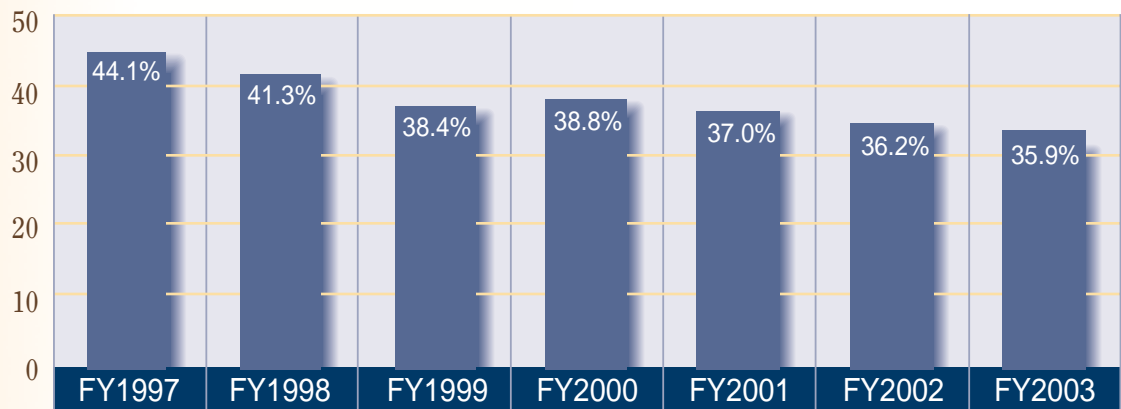
Every child benefits from having a safe, stable and permanent home and the Children's Administration strives to make this a reality for children in care as quickly and seamlessly as possible.

In Fiscal Year 1997, the median number of days children spent in out-of-home care was 644, in FY2003 the number of days was 530.

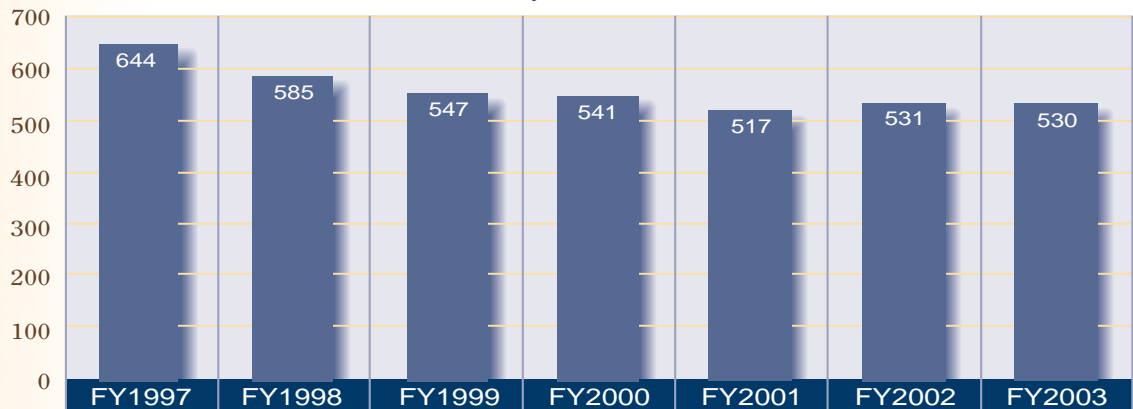
The percent of children who were in out-of-home care for more than two years was 44.1 percent in fiscal year 1997, compared to 35.9 percent in fiscal year 2003. This means that fewer children are in out-of-home care for extended periods of time and are actually spending fewer total days in care since tracking of this measure began.

Less time spent in out-of-home care translates to increased likelihood of a child returning home or being adopted.

**Percent of Children in Care More Than 60 Days
Who Have Been in Care More Than 2 years***



Median Number of Days Children are Placed in Care**



*Percent of all those children in DCFS custody currently in care for more than 60 days, who have a cumulative time in care during their current placement episode of greater than two years.

** Median cumulative time in care for all children in care for more than 60 days.

Permanency

Objective: Decrease length of stay without increasing re-entry

Measured by: Children re-entering care

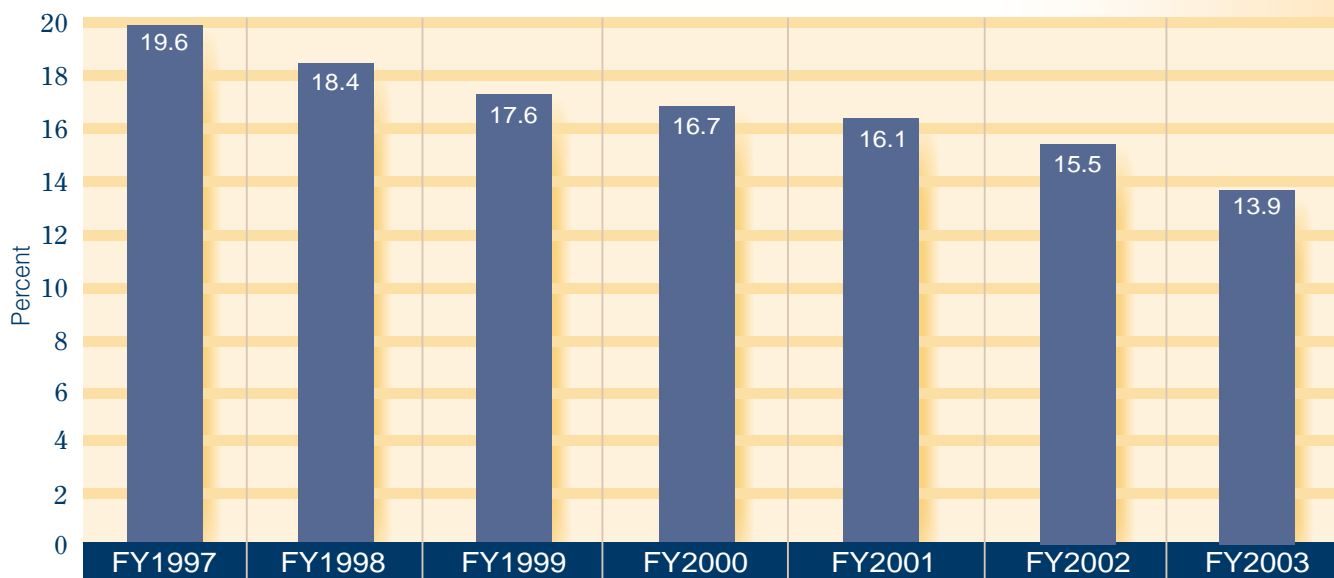
The Children's Administration returns children to the custody of their families only after safety plans are in place and families have demonstrated a willingness and ability to adequately care for their children.

Despite the implementation of safety strategies, sometimes children who are reunified with their families must again be placed in out-of-home care as the result of additional abuse or neglect.

CA has attempted to reduce re-entry rates through increased emphasis on safety assessments and planning and the use of community-based supports designed to assist families in caring for their children upon return home.

Over the course of the seven years reported, CA has demonstrated steady progress with reference to this measure decreasing the rate of re-entry by 32 percent since reporting began in 1997. Although progress has been made, the administration continues to explore ways of safeguarding children thereby reducing the re-entry rate.

**Percent of Children Re-entering Care
Within 12 Months of Reunification***



*Percent of children who re-enter out-of-home care within 12 months of reunification with their parents, regardless of length-of-stay. Based on federal calculation standards

Permanency

Objective: Increase stability for children in out-of-home care

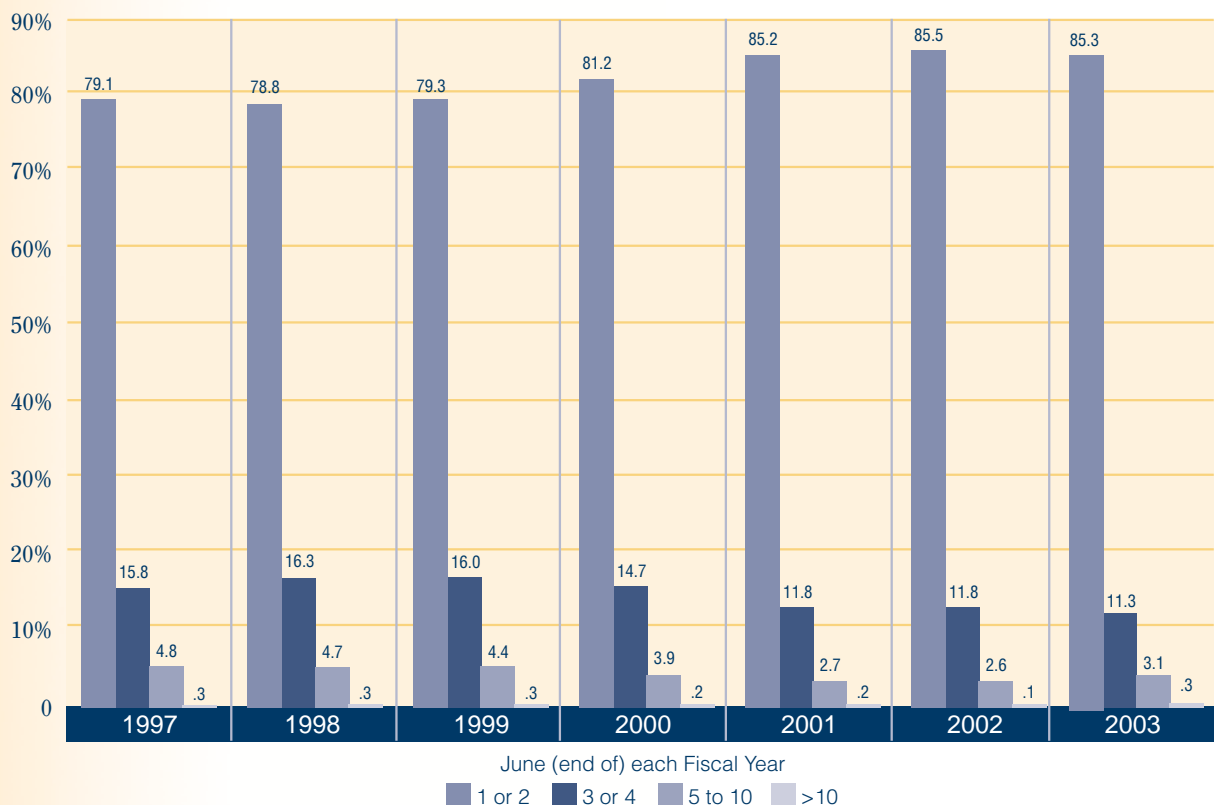
Measured by: Children with no more than two placements

Whenever a child must move to a different foster home for any reason, the progress and attachments made in familiar surroundings are at risk of being compromised.

Children in out-of-home placement who experience multiple moves often do so at the cost of meaningful connections, self-esteem and opportunities for future success.

The Children's Administration endeavors to place children in stable homes in an effort to reduce the trauma that is experienced by any child entering state licensed care. More than 80 percent of children in out-of-home care live in two or fewer homes in their first year in placement. While progress has been made regarding this measure over the seven year period reported, the administration is committed to continuing to find ways of increasing stability for all children in out-of-home care.

Percent of Children in Care for More than 60 Days within Various Numbers of Placement Events*



*The percent of children in DCFS custody who have only one or two principle places or homes of residence (placement events) during their first 12 months in care (or exiting from care within 12 months), excluding respite care, juvenile detention, hospital stays, on-the-run, and similar types of placements which do not represent a deliberate change of residence.

Permanency

Objective: Decrease over-representation of minority children in care

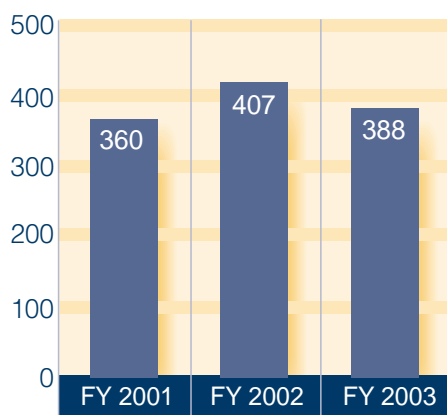
Measured by: Minority children in care longer than two years

Minority children, and more specifically those of African American and Native American heritage, make up a disproportionately high number of children in out-of-home care. This inequity is seen not only in Washington state but nationwide. The Children's Administration has made concerted efforts to identify and address the causes of this disproportionality and has enlisted the expertise and candor of community partners in the process.

While states still struggle to determine quantifiable causes for this disproportionality, the administration has moved forward toward addressing the needs of children from every cultural and ethnic background as well as their families and communities.

The Children's Administration established *The Office of African American*

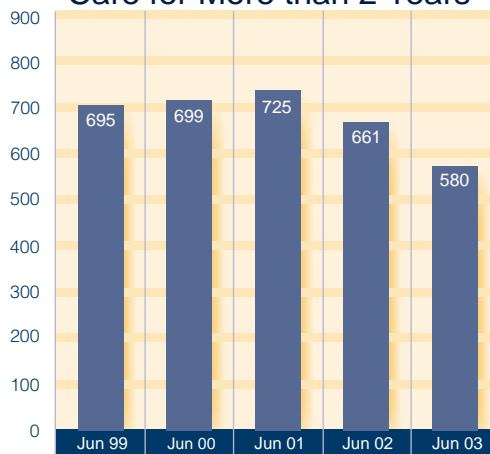
Native American Children in Care for More than 2 Years*



*The number of Native-American children who have been placed in out-of-home care for two years or longer who are not in their permanent home.

the number of Native American children in care for longer than two years decreased in fiscal year 2003.

African-American Children in Care for More than 2 Years*



*The number of African-American children who have been placed in out-of-home care for two years or longer who are not in their permanent home.

Children's Services in Region 4, to help address system and practice issues and improve service delivery to children of African American descent. Region 4 provides services to more than half of all African American children who have been in state care for more than two years.

In Fiscal Year 2003, the number of African American children who remained in care for two years or more decreased notably.

In addition, the administration has worked to improve collaboration with various Native American tribes in an effort to adequately provide for Native American children in out-of-home care. Following an increase in fiscal year 2002,

Goals of the Office of African American Children's Services

- Prevent recurrence of abuse/neglect
- Address and meet the needs of all family members
- Begin to change the system's bias toward African American families and community through the use of "best practice" approaches
- Decrease the number of African American children entering the DCFS system
- Decrease the length of stay for African American children in DCFS care, thereby expediting permanent placement
- Increase appropriate relative and kinship placements of African American children
- Establish collaborative relationships between DCFS and the African American community by involving key institutions and community leaders in the delivery of services to African American children

Permanency



- Extended foster parent training services to relative caregivers and formally changed the name of the training program to the Foster Parent/Kinship Training Institute.
- Revised Washington Administrative Code (WAC) to be more responsive to licensing services for relative caregivers.
- Implemented House Bill 1233 the Kinship Service Bill, which includes standardized relative search protocol; collaboration of public, private and community efforts to fund two Kinship Navigator positions; and establishment of a Kinship Oversight Committee.
- Received a \$1,000,000 budget proviso for the use of TANF monies for unlicensed relative caregivers.
- Celebrated the tenth annual Gubernatorial signing of the Washington State Grandparent's Proclamation.
- Awarded the first ever relative caregiver and advocate awards to the Relatives as Parents Program (RAPP)

Objective: Increase relative placements

Measured by: Children placed with extended family members

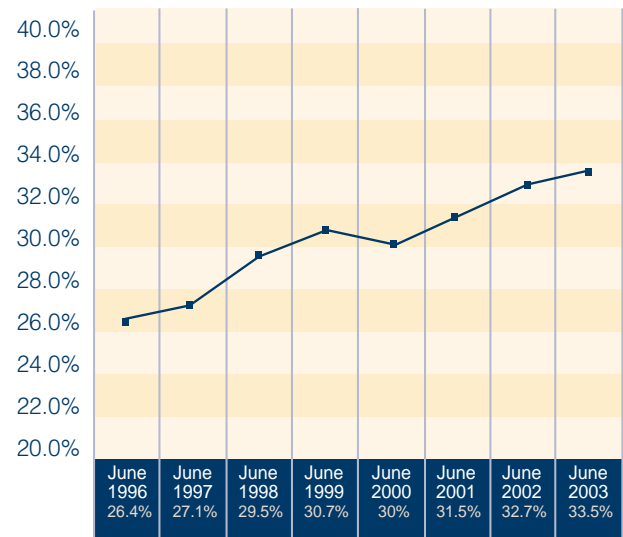
Children removed from their families due to abuse, neglect or other factors experience multiple long-term effects. Not only have children endured the traumas that lead to their removal, but often they feel tremendous grief and loss at having been separated from their only known family. Children are often fiercely loyal and have an unfathomable capacity for forgiveness. They often long only for the sense of belonging and familiarity they once knew even if it may have been amid difficult and often painful circumstances.

Throughout history, extended families have instinctively stepped in to provide for the children of deceased, ill or incapacitated parents. As families have increasingly drifted further apart both geographically and emotionally, this informal practice may not always naturally occur.

Emphasis is placed upon returning children to their families whenever it is in the child's best interest and when it is not, to seek out appropriate extended relatives with whom a child may live permanently. In cases where reunification is the permanency plan, CA attempts to place children with relatives while working toward reunification.

In Washington State this commitment may be seen at the practice, system and legislative levels, evidenced by increasing numbers of children placed with extended families, increased services to support those families and revisions to Washington Administrative Code.

Percent of Children in Placement with Relatives*



* The number of children in placement with a relative "of specified degree" for at least 60 days, excluding guardianships, on the last day of the quarter with a placement type of licensed or unlicensed relative.

Permanency

Objective: Preserve connections with parents, siblings, and other significant people

Measured by: Children visiting with their parents

Regardless of the events which precipitate a child being removed from his or her home, children more often than not feel tremendous devotion to and longing for ongoing connection to their families of origin.

Whenever it is in the best interest of children, CA is required to facilitate visitation between children in out-of-home care and their parents or legal guardians. The administration also encourages ongoing contact with siblings and other significant relatives in an effort to preserve meaningful family attachments.

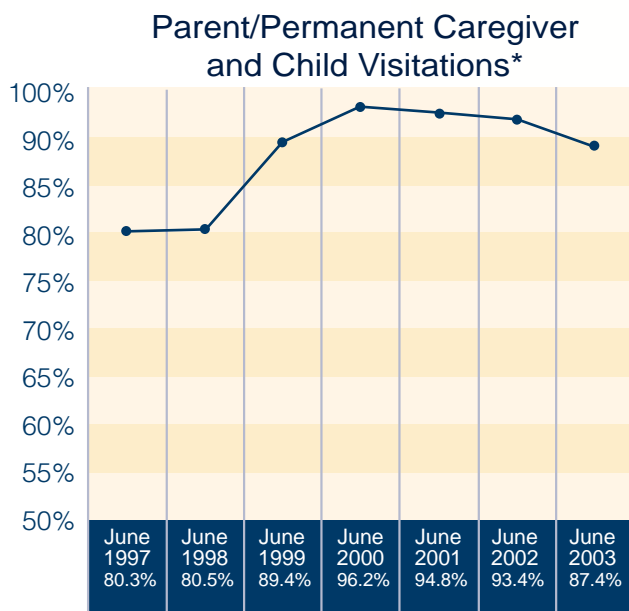
CA monitors the frequency with which children and their families visit on a thirty-day cycle. It is expected that in appropriate cases children and their families are able to visit at least once in every thirty-day period; however, visitation usually occurs much more frequently. Over the past seven years, the percent of children visiting with their families has fluctuated between 80 percent and 96 percent. In June of 2003, 87.4 percent of children in out-of-home care were able to visit with their families within the previous thirty days. This decline from the previous year appears to be due to fluctuations within a single region. It is uncertain whether the decline is in actual visitations or in data entry and reporting of those visits. In either case, the Children's Administration is exploring ways of improving both the percentage of children who visit with their caregivers and the method by which this measure is tracked.

Due to safety concerns and other factors such as unavailability of parents, it is not always possible or prudent for all children in care to visit with their families, thus it is expected that this measure will never reach 100 percent.

Do you know?

7. What are some of the goals in the priority area of "permanency"?
8. What are some factors which may influence the decision to seek the permanency plan of "guardianship" for a child?
9. The Title of House Bill 1233 and some of its provisions?

Answers may be found on page 58 of this report.



*Handcount of the percent of children with a permanent plan of reunification who visited with their parent or permanent caretaker at least once within the last 30 days of the quarter.